

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant: Vijay K. Reddy, et al.

Art Unit: 2858

Serial No.: 10/814,453

Examiner: Jeff W. Natalini

Filed: 03/31/04

Docket: TI-37048

For: VOLTAGE WAVEFORM GENERATION CIRCUIT

APPELLANTS' BRIEF UNDER 37 C.F.R. §1.192

Commissioner of Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

Dear Commissioner:

The following Appeal Brief is respectfully submitted in connection with the above-identified application in response to the Final Rejection mailed December 6, 2005. Please charge all required fees, including any extension of time fees, to the deposit account of Texas Instruments Incorporated, Deposit Account No. 20-0668.

REAL PARTY IN INTEREST

The real party in interest is Texas Instruments Incorporated, to whom this application is assigned.

RELATED APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES

There are no related appeals or interferences known to the Applicant's legal representative.

STATUS OF THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-5 and 7-10 are the subject of this appeal. Claims 1-5 and 7-10 are rejected. This application was filed on March 31, 2004.

STATUS OF THE AMENDMENTS

The Appellants filed an amendment under 37 C.F.R. § 1.116 on February 15, 2006 in response to the Office Action dated December 6, 2005, with no amendments to the claims. The Appellants filed an amendment under 37 C.F.R. § 1.111 on October 4, 2005 in response to the Office Action dated July 13, 2005.

SUMMARY OF CLAIMED SUBJECT MATTER

Referring now to Figure 3, an exemplary test methodology 300 is shown in accordance with embodiments of the invention. As can be appreciated, the ability to inject overshoots and undershoots into a circuit under test in accordance with embodiments of the invention may lead to the development of more accurate circuit reliability models. Such models may be used for channel-hot-carrier (CHC) degradation, negative bias temperature instability (NBTI), gate oxide reliability, and electro-migration. The test methodology 300 for generating such models may inject voltage overshoots and/or undershoots into the circuit under test for a period of time commonly referred to as the “stress interval.” Before the stress interval, a pre-stress characterization measurement may be taken of the device under test (block 302). The measurement may determine the frequency of oscillation and the quiescent state of current (I_{DDQ}) through the power supply line (V_{DD}) of the device under test. During the stress interval, additional characterization measurements of the frequency of oscillation and the quiescent state of current through the power supply line may be obtained (block 306). The stress interval may end after a predetermined time period or a measurable condition, such as circuit failure, occurs (block 308). After the stress interval, a post-stress measurement may be obtained (block 310). Comparing the pre-stress characterization measurement, the characterization measurements obtained during the stress interval, and the post-test characterization measurement may reveal if and when the device under test begins to behave abnormally. The comparison may be accomplished, for example, by plotting the

characterization measurements to produce graphs that reveal the behavior of the circuit under test before, after, and during the stress interval.

Referring now to Figure 4, a block diagram of an exemplary waveform generation system 400 is shown in accordance with embodiments of the invention. As shown, a user 402 may select waveform parameters 404 describing a voltage waveform desired to be generated. The waveform parameters 404 preferably comprise the following five parameters: the type of waveform (e.g., an overshoot or undershoot), the magnitude of the waveform, the duration of the waveform, the frequency of the waveform, and the duty cycle of the waveform. Although typically all five parameters are selected by the user 402, certain combinations of parameters may also be selected by processing software 406. For example, an overshoot may be selected with defined magnitude, duration, and frequency parameters. The processing software 406 may determine an appropriate duty cycle for the overshoot or select an arbitrary duty cycle. The processing software 406 processes the waveform parameters 404 into a request 408 that is sent on a communications bus 410, such as an inter-IC (I²C) bus, to a waveform generation circuit 412. The generation circuit 412 utilizes the request 408 to generate an output waveform 414. The output waveform 412 may be applied to any desired electrical device under test 416 (DUT), such as a transistor or capacitor.

Figure 5 depicts a procedure 500 for generating voltage waveforms in accordance with embodiments of the invention. The procedure 500 may start by connecting the device 414 to the waveform generation circuit (block 502). After the connection has been established, waveform parameters 404 may be selected (block 504). As previously discussed, the waveform parameters 404 may comprise the type of waveform (e.g., an

overshoot or undershoot), the magnitude of the waveform, the duration of the waveform, the frequency of the waveform, and the duty cycle of the waveform. After selection of the waveform parameters 404, the processing software 406 may process the waveform parameters 404 into a request 408 (block 505). The request 408 may be sent on the bus 410 to the waveform generation circuit 412 (block 506). The request 408 may be applied to the waveform generation circuit 412 to generate a waveform corresponding to the parameters 404 (block 508).

Referring now to Figure 6, a block diagram of an exemplary waveform generation circuit 600 that is capable of producing voltage overshoots is shown. As shown, the waveform generation circuit 600 comprises a current regulator 602, a controlled oscillator 604, a clock 606, a discharge device 608, a comparator 610, a programmable delay circuit 612, and a device under test 614.

The current regulator 602 preferably comprises a voltage and temperature invariant charge pump that outputs current proportional to the frequency of the controlled oscillator 604. The clock 606 and the controlled oscillator 604 preferably operate in the gigahertz (10^9 hertz) frequency range in order to produce voltage waveforms that overshoot the settled value for a duration on the order of picoseconds (10^{-12} seconds). The clock 606 may comprise a phase locked loop (PLL) circuit, or any other type of controllable oscillator. The comparator 610 preferably possesses a fast switching to minimize the timing propagation into the programmable delay circuit 612. The programmable delay circuit 612 may comprise a chain of inverters, each inverter preferably representing approximately 20 picoseconds of delay. The frequency of the oscillator 604 may be controlled by an input 616, the period of delay caused by the

programmable delay circuit 612 may be controlled by an input 618, and the frequency of the clock 606 may be controlled by an input 610.

Depending upon the voltage applied to the input 616, the oscillator 604 may produce a signal with a known frequency of oscillation. When a rising edge of the clock 606 enables the current regulator 602, the signal produced by the controlled oscillator 604 may cause the current regulator 602 to charge the V^+ node of the comparator, thereby increasing the voltage of the device under test (V_{DUT}). When the V^+ node of the comparator 610 becomes greater than the reference voltage V_{REF} applied to the V^- node, a delay is instantiated by the programmable delay circuit 612. During the delay, the current regulator 602 may continue to increase the voltage of the device under test (V_{DUT}) to a value of $V_{DDSTRESS}$. After the delay, a discharge mechanism is instantiated by the discharge device 608. During the discharge, the voltage of the device under test (V_{DUT}) is reduced to a nominal V_{DD} value. When a falling edge of the clock 606 disables the current regulator 602, the voltage of the device under test (V_{DUT}) is discharged to approximately zero volts. The process of charging and discharging the voltage of the device under test (V_{DUT}) may repeat every cycle of the clock 606.

The input 616, the input 618, the input 620, the reference voltage V_{REF} , and the stress voltage $V_{DDSTRESS}$ may be used to produce a desired overshoot voltage waveform at the V_{DUT} node that is in accordance with the waveform parameters 404 selected by a user. The current regulator 602 controls the magnitude of the overshoot via the $V_{DDSTRESS}$ signal, the programmable delay circuit 612 controls the duration of the overshoot via the input 618, the clock 606 controls the frequency of waveform and the duty cycle of the waveform via the input 620.

Figure 8 illustrates an exemplary circuit-level implementation of the waveform generation circuit 600. The circuit is constructed using the components discussed in the foregoing discussion. More specifically, a current regulator 802 is coupled to a voltage comparator 804. The comparator 804 generates a rising edge once node V_+ is greater than V_{REF} . A set-reset (S/R) flip-flop 806 triggers the discharging transistor attached to node V_+ after an insertion delay introduced by a programmable delay circuit 808. Thus, the actual value of the overshoot voltage may be set by the value of V_{REF} and the duration of the overshoot may be set by the programmable delay circuit 808.

GROUND OF REJECTION TO BE REVIEWED ON APPEAL

Rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 102 (b) as being anticipated by US Patent No. 6,535,014.

ARGUMENT

Rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 102 (b) as being anticipated by US Patent No. 6,535,014

Claims 1 -5 and 7-10

Claim 1 includes "...processing a request for a voltage overshoot or undershoot to determine a plurality of inputs based, in part, on a plurality of waveform parameters; applying the plurality of inputs to a waveform generation circuit ...". US Patent No. 6,535,014 does not show, teach, or suggest the above recited limitations of claim 1. Col 3, lines 32-44 of US Patent No. 6,535,014 does not disclose determining a plurality of inputs and applying the inputs to a waveform generation circuit. Col 3, lines 32-35 of US Patent No. 6,535,014 discloses a multiplexer for selectively connecting an oscillator test signal, a first voltage, or a second voltage to the circuit path that is being tested. Col 3, lines 14-44 of US Patent No. 6,535,014 does not disclose determining a plurality of inputs based on a plurality of waveform parameters.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Appellants respectfully submit that the Examiner's final rejection of Claims 1-5 and 7-10 is improper, and it is respectfully requested that the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences so find and reverse the Examiner's rejection.

Please charge any fees necessary in connection with the filing of this paper, including any necessary extension of time fees, to Deposit Account No. 20-0668 of Texas Instruments Incorporated.

Respectfully submitted,

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CLAIMS APPENDIX

1. A method, comprising:
processing a request for a voltage overshoot or undershoot to determine a plurality of inputs based, in part, on a plurality of waveform parameters;
applying the plurality of inputs to a waveform generation circuit; and
generating a voltage waveform in accordance with at least one of the parameters.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the waveform generation circuit comprises an overshoot waveform generation circuit, and the waveform parameters comprise voltage overshoot waveform parameters.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the waveform generation circuit comprises an undershoot waveform generation circuit, and the waveform parameters comprise voltage undershoot waveform parameters.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein the waveform parameters are selected from the group consisting of a magnitude, a duration, a frequency, and a duty cycle.
5. The method of claim 1 wherein processing the request comprises determining an oscillation frequency.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein processing the request comprises determining a voltage value to apply to a delay circuit.
8. The method of claim 1 wherein processing the request comprises determining a voltage value to apply to a voltage controlled oscillator.
9. The method of claim 1 wherein processing the request further comprises processing the request based, in part, on the characteristics of the waveform generation circuit.
10. The method of claim 1 further comprising generating a circuit reliability model for a device coupled to the waveform generation circuit.

EVIDENCE APPENDIX

None.

RELATED PROCEEDINGS APPENDIX

None.